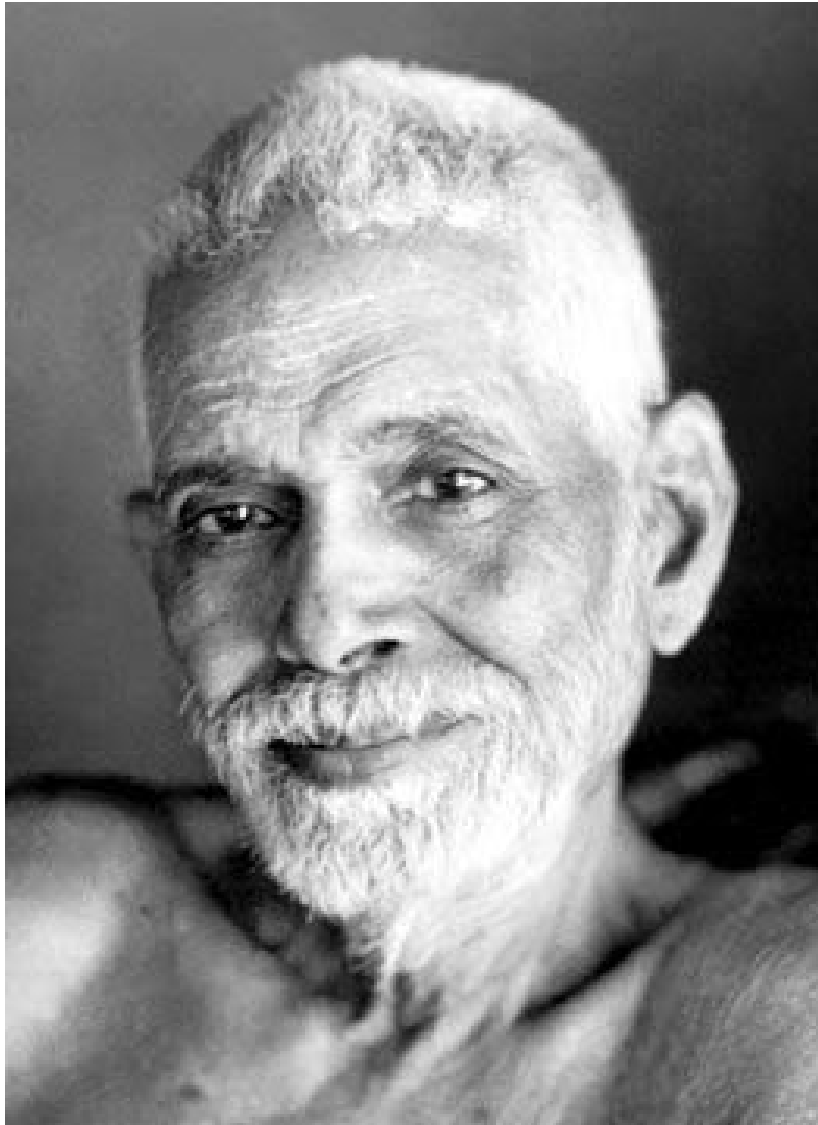


# UPADESA SARAM (The Essence of the Teachings)

*by*  
*Bhagavan*  
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*With brief commentary/explanatory notes by Tom Das*



# Introduction

*In Sri Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi's Upadesa Saram (The Essence of Instruction), we have in concise form all we need to know in order to attain liberation in this life. The teaching is densely packed in, making the teaching all the sweeter for the ripe seeker of Truth.*

*Here you will find universal teachings for enlightenment, the true Vedanta.*

*That said, two other of Ramana's texts which compliment this work are [Nan Yar? \(Who am I?\)](#) and [Ulladu Narpadu \(Forty Verses on Reality\)](#). Together, in my view, these three texts form a comprehensive and complete teaching for liberation in concise form.*

***I have made some comments (in italicised red)** which hopefully make the teachings clearer, but have attempted to keep these to a minimum so the actual force, beauty and true meaning of the text is not diluted and lost amidst my verbiage!*

***!Om Namo Bhagavate Sri Ramanaya Om!***

# The Text

1. कर्तुराज्ञया प्राप्यते फलम् ।  
कर्म किं परं कर्म तज्जडम् ॥ १ ॥

kartur ājñyayā prāpyate phalaṃ  
karma kiṃ paraṃ karma tajjaḍam

**1. Action yields fruit,  
For so the Lord ordains it.  
How can action be the Lord?  
It is insentient.**

*Cause and effect ('action' and 'fruit' respectively, or karma) is essentially a mechanical process, insentient, subject to change, and not at all the Divine. Put differently, the world of cause and effect is not, in essence, the Self or the Lord. The world of cause and effect, or karma, is all non-Self.*

2. कृतिमहोदधौ पतनकारणम् ।  
फलमशाश्वतं गतिनिरोधकम् ॥ २ ॥

kṛti-maho-dadhau patana-kāraṇam  
phalama-śaśvataṃ gati-nirodhakam

**2. The fruit of action passes.  
But action leaves behind  
Seed of further action  
Leading to an endless ocean of action;  
Not at all to moksha.**

*This here is a very important verse. All actions are limited, and therefore give rise to limited effects. These effects then in turn become the cause for another limited effect, and so on. Limited actions cannot give rise to That, in which there are no limits, so no limited actions can lead to Moksha.*

*The unstated implication is THAT which we are looking for -The Absolute, Brahman, call IT what you will – THAT is already fully and completely here – no action is required to attain the Self, as we are already THAT. Delving around in the world of objects and cause and effect will not lead to Liberation, which already IS.*

3. ईश्वरार्पितं नेच्छया कृतम् ।  
चित्तशोधकं मुक्तिसाधकम् ॥ ३ ॥

īśvarārpitaṁ necchayā kṛtaṁ  
citta-śodhakaṁ mukti-sādhakam

**3. Disinterested action  
Surrendered to the Lord  
Purifies the mind and points  
The way to moksha.**

*Becoming increasingly disinterested in things that happen in the world, carrying out your social and ethical duties whilst surrendering all to Him – this is conducive to Liberation.*

4. कायवाङ्मनः कार्यमुत्तमम् ।  
पूजनं जपश्चिन्तनं क्रमात् ॥ ४ ॥

kāya-vāñ-manaḥ kāryam-uttamam  
pūjanaṁ japa-ścintanaṁ kramāt

**4. This is certain:  
Worship, praise and meditation,  
Being work of body, speech and mind,  
Are steps for orderly ascent.**

*Bhagavan gives us a hierarchy of spiritual practices, starting with worship (which utilises the body), then going to use praise (which utilises speech), and then to the higher practice of meditation (which utilises the mind).*

*We are not to greedily jump straight to meditation as it is the higher practice, unless we are naturally ripe for this, but to start where we are for ‘orderly ascent’. In the next few verses Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi will explain these practices to us in greater detail:*

5. जगत ईशधी युक्तसेवनम् ।  
अष्टमूर्तिभृद्देवपूजनम् ॥ ५॥

jagata īśadhī yukta sevanam  
aṣṭa-mūrti bhṛd deva-pūjanam

**5. Ether, fire, air, water, earth,  
Sun, moon and living beings  
Worship of these,  
Regarded all as forms of His,  
Is perfect worship of the Lord.**

*Worship of God can be worship of Him in any form, as long as we realise that the  
object itself is not Him, but just a divine expression of Him.*

6. उत्तमस्तवादुच्चमन्दतः ।  
चित्तजं जपध्यानमुत्तमम् ॥ ६॥

uttama-stavād-ucca-mandataḥ  
cittajam japa dhyānam uttamam

**6. Better than hymns of praise  
Is repetition of the Name;  
Better low-voiced than loud,  
But best of all  
Is meditation in the mind.**

*The practice becomes, in time, increasingly subtle, starting from coarser practices  
involving the body and then speech, to subtler practices of the mind, as per verse 4.*

7. आज्यधारया स्रोतसा समम् ।  
सरलचिन्तनं विरलतः परम् ॥ ७॥

ajya-dhāraya srotasā samam  
sarala cintanam viralataḥ param

**7. Better than spells of meditation  
Is one continuous current,  
Steady as a stream,  
Or downward flow of oil.**

*Over time, meditation should move from the sporadic to the continuous. A wonderful traditional metaphor of a continuous current of a river or a steady stream of oil as it is poured is used so there is no mistake as to what this means: continuous meditation means continuous meditation. What exactly is this meditation, and how can it be done? Worry not! Bhagavan will explain all to us in later verses. How lucky we are to have these beautiful teachings of His!*

8. भेदभावनात् सोऽहमित्यसौ ।  
भावनाऽभिदा पावनी मता ॥ ८ ॥

bheda-bhāvanāt so'hamityasau  
bhavana'bhidā pāvanī matā

**8. Better than viewing Him as Other,  
Indeed the noblest attitude of all,  
Is to hold Him as the 'I' within,  
The very 'I'.**

*A key part of the teachings is this – to realise that all is non-separate from Him. Furthermore, He is none other than the essence of You, the 'I' within. In earlier verses such as 5 and 6 it may be thought that God is an entity external to you.*

*However here it is made clear that you are not praising a divine entity that is separate from your Being. All this is implied in verses 20 and 23, and more clearly stated in verse 26.*

*The next verse also continues this same theme, but going one step further, the form of devotion and worship becoming ever more subtle and direct:*

9. भावशून्यसद्भावसुस्थितिः ।  
भावनाबलाद्भक्तिरुत्तमा ॥ ९ ॥

bhāva śūnyasad bhāva susthitiḥ  
bhāvanā-balād bhaktir-uttamā

**9. Abidance in pure being  
Transcending thought through love intense  
Is the very essence  
Of supreme devotion.**

10. हृत्स्थले मनः स्वस्थता क्रिया ।  
भक्तियोगबोधाश्च निश्चितम् ॥ १० ॥

hṛtsthale manaḥ svasthata kriyā  
bhakti yoga bodhaśca niścitam

**10. Absorption in the heart of being,  
Whence we sprang,  
Is the path of action, of devotion,  
Of union and of knowledge.**

*For the more intellectually inclined, this verse can be illuminating. Bhagavan is stating here, in line with the Upanishads (eg. Amritabindu Upanishad verses 2-5) and Bhagavad Gita (eg Chapter 5 verse 4), that all the main yogas are, at this stage in the practice, essentially one and the same.*

***Abiding as the Self IS the path of action, abiding as the Self IS Devotion,  
abiding as the Self IS Yoga ('union'), abiding as the Self IS Knowledge.***

*Amritabindu Upanishad, verse 5: 'The mind should be prevented from functioning, until it dissolves itself in the heart. This is Jnana, this is Dhyana, the rest is all mere concoction of untruth.'*

*Bhagavad Gita 5.4: 'Only the ignorant say that the yoga of knowledge and the yoga of devotional action are different, wise people do not. One who is perfectly established in one, obtains the result of both.'*

11. वायुरोधनाल्लीयते मनः ।  
जालपक्षिवद्रोधसाधनम् ॥ ११ ॥

vayu-rodhanāl liyate manaḥ  
jāla-pakṣivat rodha-sāadhanam

**11. Holding the breath controls the mind,  
A bird caught in a net.  
Breath-regulation helps  
Absorption in the heart.**

*A key teaching that regulation of the breath is a useful aid to Abiding as Self. The invitation is to take up this advice and incorporate it into your practice.*

12. चित्तवायवश्चित्क्रियायुताः ।

शाखयोर्द्वयी शक्तिमूलका ॥ १२ ॥

citta-vāyavaś cit-kriyāyutāḥ  
śā khayor-dvayi śakti-mūlakā

**12. Mind and breath (as thought and action)  
Fork out like two branches.  
But both spring  
From a single root.**

*Both the mind and breath or actions, in fact all phenomena, arise from a single Source. The implication is that finding the source of the mind can also be done by finding the source of the breath.*

13. लयविनाशने उभयरोधने ।  
लयगतं पुनर्भवति नो मृतम् ॥ १३ ॥

laya vinaśane ubhaya-rodhane  
laya-gataṁ punar bhavati no mṛtam

**13. Absorption is of two sorts;  
Submergence and destruction.  
Mind submerged rises again;  
Dead, it revives no more.**

*The implication is that death of mind is the goal, rather than just a mere temporary quiescence of mind. Next the method by which the mind can be killed is given:*

14. प्राणबन्धनाल्लीनमानसम् ।  
एकचिन्तनान्नाशमेत्यदः ॥ १४ ॥

prāṇa-bandhanāt līna-mānasam  
eka-cintanāt nāśametyadaḥ

**14. Breath controlled and thought restrained,  
The mind turned one-way inward  
Fades and dies.**

*Why kill the mind? It is through killing the mind that one abides as the Self and returns to one's own 'natural being', which is without action:*



15. नष्टमानसोत्कृष्टयोगिनः ।  
कृत्यमस्ति किं स्वस्थितिं यतः ॥ १५ ॥

naṣṭa-manasot-kr̥ṣṭa yoginaḥ  
kṛtyam asti kiṃ svasthitim yataḥ

**15. Mind extinct, the mighty seer  
Returns to his own natural being  
And has no action to perform.**

*Yoga Vasishta, one of Ramana's favourite traditional texts, says:*

*'Supreme Bliss cannot be experienced through contact of the senses with their  
objects. The supreme state is that in which the mind is annihilated through  
one-pointed enquiry.'*

*and elsewhere it also states:*

*'Every moving or unmoving thing whatsoever is only an object visualised by the  
mind. When the mind is annihilated, duality (i.e. multiplicity) is not perceived.'*

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*Now we are half-way through the text. The essential teaching has already been given and the text could end here. However, in the second half further elucidation and clarification will be lovingly dispensed:*

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16. दृश्यवारितं चित्तमात्मनः ।  
चित्त्वदर्शनं तत्त्वदर्शनम् ॥ १६ ॥

dr̥śya-vāritam citta-mātmanah  
citva-darśanam tattva darśanam

**16. It is true wisdom  
For the mind to turn away  
From outer objects and behold  
Its own effulgent form.**

*What is true wisdom? It is for the mind to turn away from all objects and phenomena and abide as the Self.*

*Some confusion may arise as to how the mind, the nature of which is thought (verse 18), can behold it's 'own effulgent form'. When the mind is turn outward, occupied with objects such as thoughts, feelings, the body and the outer world of objects, it is called the mind. When the mind is no longer occupied with these things, it is none other than the Self.*

*Ramana states In Day by Day with Bhagavan: 'The mind turned inwards is the Self; turned outwards, it becomes the ego and all the world'*

*Yoga Vasishta states: 'Consciousness which is undivided imagines to itself desirable objects and runs after them. It is then known as the mind.' and also elsewhere states:*

*'After knowing that by which you know this (world) turn the mind inward and then you will see clearly (i.e. realize) the effulgence of the Self.' and elsewhere states:*

*'O Rama, the mind has, by its own activity, bound itself; when it is calm it is free.'*

17. मानसं तु किं मार्गणे कृते ।  
नैव मानसं मार्ग आर्जवात् ॥ १७ ॥

mānasaṃ tu kiṃ mārgaṇe kṛte  
naiva mānasaṃ mārga ārjavāt

**17. When unceasingly the mind  
Scans its own form  
There is nothing of the kind.  
For every one  
This path direct is open.**

*Another key verse here. The insight here is that the mind is not a real entity, just an imagined one. When searched for, it cannot be found as a distinct entity. What a wonderful and essential teaching is presented here! It is further expounded on in the next two verses:*

18. वृत्तयस्त्वहं वृत्तिमाश्रिताः ।  
वृत्तयो मनो विद्ध्यहं मनः ॥ १८ ॥

vṛttayastvahaṃ vṛtti-maśritaḥ  
vṛttayo mano viddhayaṃ manas

**18. Thoughts alone make up the mind;  
And of all thoughts the 'I' thought is the root.  
What is called mind is but the notion 'I'.**

*The mind is nothing but a bundle of thoughts, and it is founded upon the I-concept.  
The concept of a separate 'me' or 'I' is the mind.*

19. अहमयं कुतो भवति चिन्वतः ।  
अयि पतत्यहं निजविचारणम् ॥ १९ ॥

ahamayaṃ kuto bhavati cinvataḥ  
ayi patatyahaṃ nijavicāraṇam

**19. When one turns within and searches  
Whence this 'I' thought arises,  
The shamed 'I' vanishes –  
And wisdom's quest begins.**

*The above verse states this is but the beginning of self-enquiry, ‘the quest’. How do we proceed after we have searched for the source of the I-concept and found it to be non-existent? Let us see:*

20. अहमि नाशभाज्यहमहंतया ।  
स्फुरति हृत्स्वयं परमपूर्णसत् ॥ २० ॥

ahami nāśa-bhā-jyahama-hantaya  
sphurati hr̥t-svayaṁ parama-pūrṇa-sat

**20. Where this ‘I’ notion faded  
Now there as I–I, arises  
The One, the very Self,  
The Infinite.**

*The Self is defined as that in which there is no I-concept, no concept of a ‘me’. This can only be realised non-verbally through practice and direct experience.*

21. इदमहं पदाऽभिख्यमन्वहम् ।  
अहमिलीनकेऽप्यलयसत्तया ॥ २१ ॥

idamaham padā’bhikhyamanvahaṁ  
aham-ilīnake’pyalaya sattyā

**21. Of the term, ‘I’, the permanent import  
Is That. For even in deep sleep  
Where we have no sense of ‘I’  
We do not cease to be.**

*A pointer here that what is known as ‘I’ is actually none other than THAT, ie. God or the Absolute, the Infinite – the Self. Ramana states in [Who Am I? \(Nan Yar?\)](#) ‘By a steady and continuous investigation into the nature of the mind, the mind is transformed into That to which ‘I’ refers; and that is in fact the Self’.*

*Even in deep sleep, whilst there is no I-concept, we still exist do we not? This gives us a clue as to our True Essential Nature (True Self).*

22. विग्रहेन्द्रियप्राणधीतमः ।  
नाहमेकसत्तज्जडं ह्यसत् ॥ २२ ॥

vigrah-endriya prāṇa-dhītamah  
nāhameka-sat tajjaḍam hyasat

**22. Body, senses, mind, breath, sleep –  
All insentient and unreal –  
Cannot be ‘I’,  
‘I’ who am the Real.**

*Rather late on in the text Ramana introduces to us the teaching of discerning the Self from the non-Self (Viveka, or Atma-anatma-viveka). The essence of what we are, which does not change, which is ever-present and ‘Real’, cannot be that which changes and that which has no consciousness of its own (ie. ‘insentient’). The real is that which illuminates the unreal, ie. is consciousness or sentient.*

23. सत्त्वभासिका चित्क्ववेतरा ।  
सत्तया हि चित्चित्तया ह्यहम् ॥ २३ ॥  
sattva-bhāsika citkva vetarā  
sattayā hi cit cittayā hyaham

**23. For knowing That which is  
There is no other knower.  
Hence Being is Awareness;  
And we all are Awareness.**

*Awareness needs no second light to illuminate it. Indeed there is no second thing apart from the Self that can know the Self, for the Self is One and All, and there is nothing outside of or apart from it. We may need a light source to illuminate a common everyday object in darkness, but the sun needs no secondary light source to be seen. It is self-shining. Similarly the Self is self-shining. It needs no other to know itself.*

*To know the Self, THAT, is not really a knowing in that there is no second object to be known (for the Self is non-dual), but ‘knowing the Self’ really is just BEING the Self, or BEING AWARENESS.*

24. ईशजीवयोर्वेषधीभिदा ।  
सत्स्वभावतो वस्तु केवलम् ॥ २४ ॥

īśa-jīvayor veṣa-dhī-bhidā  
sat-svabhāvato vastu kevalam

**24. In the nature of their being  
Creature and creator are in substance one.  
They differ only  
In adjuncts and awareness.**

*Ramana makes some clarifications here so we are clear on what is being said. He is stating that the nature of the individual or jiva (ie. 'creature' which is actually a translation of jiva) is the same as the essential nature of God or Ishvara ('creator', which is a translation of Isa or Isvara, ie. the Lord). The difference is only in the phenomenal appearance, but both are in essence BEING-AWARENESS. This reasoning is taken further in the next verse:*

25. वेषहानतः स्वात्मदर्शनम् ।  
ईशदर्शनं स्वात्मरूपतः ॥ २५ ॥

veṣa-hānataḥ svātma-darśanam  
īśa-darśanam svātma-rūpataḥ

**25. Seeing oneself free of all attributes  
Is to see the Lord,  
For He shines ever as the pure Self.**

*Therefore, if you 'see' yourself devoid of all phenomena and 'attributes', which means to be aware but to be devoid of thoughts, feelings, body and worldly objects, then you are seeing your essential nature, which is to see God (Isa or Ishvara). Your essential nature is Him. Remember, the word seeing doesn't mean you are seeing something, for there is no duality here. Ramana, out of his love and compassion for us, tells us as follows:*

26. आत्मसंस्थितिः स्वात्मदर्शनम् ।  
आत्मनिर्द्वयादात्मनिष्ठता ॥ २६ ॥

ātma-saṁsthiṭiḥ svātma-darśanam  
ātma-nirdvayād ātma-niṣṭhatā

**26. To know the Self is but to be the Self,  
For it is non-dual.  
In such knowledge  
One abides as that.**

*He reminds us that this is not a dualistic knowing (of objects), but just BEING THAT. The word 'know' is just a dualistic phrase used, dualistic as it implies a knower and something that is known, whereas here there is no knower or known, just BEING-AWARENESS. Ramana continues to make it clear for us:*

27. ज्ञानवर्जिताऽज्ञानहीनचित् ।  
ज्ञानमस्ति किं ज्ञातुमन्तरम् ॥ २७ ॥  
jñāna-varjitā-jñāna-hina cit  
jñānam-asti kiṁ jñātum-antaram

**27. That is true knowledge which transcends  
Both knowledge and ignorance,  
For in pure knowledge  
Is no object to be known.**

*True Knowledge is simply a synonym for the Self, and there are no objects in the Self or apart from the Self. There is only the Self.*

*The Amritabindu Upanishad says, in verse 4:*

*'The mind severed from all connection with sensual objects, and prevented from functioning out, awakes into the light of the heart, and finds the highest condition.'*



28. किं स्वरूपमित्यात्मदर्शने ।  
अव्ययाऽभवाऽऽपूर्णचित्सुखम् ॥ २८ ॥  
kiṃ svarūpamit-yātma darśane  
avyayābhavā” pūrṇa-cit sukham

**28. Having known one's nature one abides  
As being with no beginning and no end  
In unbroken consciousness and bliss.**

*Importantly, this state is to be 'abided in', for want of better wording, meaning that we are not to be attracted to sense-objects and become involved with thoughts and feelings and things (ie. the world) and so give birth to the mind (see verse 16 and commentary), but to remain in Truth as Truth, as BEING-AWARENESS (sat-chit) devoid of any objects, which is known as BLISS (written as sukha here, which means happiness in Sanskrit, often called ananda, which also means happiness.)*

29. बन्धमुक्त्यतीतं परं सुखम् ।  
विन्दतीह जीवस्तु दैविकः ॥ २९ ॥

bandha muktyatītaṃ paraṃ sukham  
vindatīhajī vastu daivikaḥ

**29. Beyond bondage and release,  
Is steadfastness  
In service of the Lord.**

*Again, like in verse 28, verse 29 implies a continuance in remaining in this stateless state which is transcendent to both liberation and bondage, which are both to do with phenomenal existence.*

*In verse 28 the language of knowledge is used, 'Having known one's nature...'. here in verse 29 the language of devotion is used.*

*In verses 1 and 2 Ramana has hinted that the world of insentient objects is not the way, and in verse 10 Ramana has already told us that true devotion and true knowledge are simply to abide as sat-chit-ananda devoid of adjuncts or phenomena. This is written here poetically as 'steadfast service of the Lord'. Continue to abide as the Self, That which is beyond dualities of liberation and bondage, That in which there is no change, That which is the nature of 'unbroken Consciousness and Bliss' (verse 28).*

30. अहमपेतकं निजविभानकम् ।  
महदिदंतपो रमनवागियम् ॥ ३० ॥

aham-apetakam nija-vibhānakam  
mahadidaṁ tapo ramaṇa vāgiyam

**30. All ego gone,  
Living as that alone  
Is penance good for growth,  
Sings Ramana, the Self.**

*Remaining as the Self, that in which there is no ego, is the only way to Moksha. It is the culmination of the path of devotion, knowledge, yoga and action. It is both the highest Knowledge and highest Devotion and also beyond knowledge and devotion.*

*To abide as the Self that is of the nature sat-chit-sukha, until the ego is destroyed, never to arise again (cf. verses 13-15) is Moksha (liberation) itself.*

*So sings Guru Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi!*

***!Om Namō Bhagavate Sri Ramanaya Om!***

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